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ABSTRACT

Bibliotherapy appears to be a viable technique for reading teachers to use. The increased emphasis on values and values clarification in the classroom is just one of the many apparent uses of bibliotherapy and its techniques. Bibliotherapy is also a useful adjunct to the teaching of critical reading, because it requires the student to use higher level comprehension skills, including comparison, evaluation, and application. Teachers should be cautioned that implementing the technique proficiently will require an adequate technical knowledge of the process, the ability to identify and evaluate the needs of students who might profit from bibliotherapy, the selection of appropriate books for bibliotherapy, and the use of various followup activities. (Selected references on bibliotherapy are attached.) (RL)

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USING BIBLIOTHERAPY: A SYNTHESIS OF CURRENT PRACTICE*

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The process of bibliotherapy is not new; it was developed and used before the 20th Century. Inscriptions placed on ancient Greek libraries alluded to the healing power of books (Shepherd and Iles, 1976). In the United States, reading was first recommended as a treatment aid in hospitals in the early 19th Century (Shepherd and Iles, 1976). In 1916, Crothers noted the technique in referring to the Bibliopathic Institute, and since that time, bibliotherapy has been discussed in medical, educational and library literature (Heitzmann and Heitzmann, 1975) and has been used in hospitals and other institutions with patients having mental and physical disorders (Olsen, 1975). Bibliotherapy was a technique employed by doctors and librarians in institutional settings before the 1950's when scattered articles and dissertations began to suggest the use of the technique with average school children (Heitzmann and Heitzmann, 1975). Currently, the use of bibliotherapy by school counselors and teachers is commonly discussed in educational literature, with techniques for actual implementation being found along with largely theoretical, general discussions of the bibliotherapeutic process.

Rationale

Since many students have emotional as well as reading difficulties, a useful technique to assist pupils in coming to terms with personal problems, not necessarily related to reading skills, is needed if the students are to be helped to achieve their full reading potential. Some teachers, especially those with small classes are in a position to have a closer and

more helpful relationship with students than other adults, friends or librarians. However, in order to use the counseling technique of bibliotherapy intelligently, a teacher must have some practical knowledge concerning the methodology of the process, techniques of implementation, and a realistic understanding of the potential effectiveness of the approach. The thrust of this discussion will be a description of four aspects of bibliotherapy in relation to the teacher of reading.

Methodology

First, bibliotherapy obviously depends on a teacher actually getting the child to read books (Russell and Russell, 1979) or short stories (McKinney, 1977) appropriate to his problem. However, the teacher's act of bringing together the student and the potentially helpful reading selection does not constitute bibliotherapy; it is a process which seeks to create attitudinal and later behavioral changes in the reader which are facilitated through discussions and counseling during and/or after the reading (Hoagland, 1972). In order to effect the therapeutic changes, the theoretical process that a teacher attempts to guide the reader through is one of "identification, catharsis, and insight" (Russell and Shrodes in Rubin, 1978, p. 212). In this procedure, the reader becomes so personally involved with the literature that strong identification with a character or group in the selection is produced; because of the strong identification, he experiences a release of tensions concerning his own problem and, thereby gains insight into his behavioral motives and actions (Russell and Shrodes in Rubin, 1978, p. 212).

The process of bibliotherapy described above can be used by the reading teacher as a preventative or therapeutic measure (Olsen, 1975). As Olsen (1975) explains, preventive bibliotherapy can be used with a child to help him adapt to an upcoming stressful situation, such as the birth of a new baby in the family; therapeutic bibliotherapy is used to help a child deal with difficulties he is currently experiencing, such as adjusting to a new school. In general, the teacher using either type of bibliotherapy is attempting to teach the student to think confidently and constructively; to discuss openly his problems; to compare his difficulties with problems faced by others; to analyze his feelings and behavioral practices; to look for all the possible solutions to problems; and to be anxious to find appropriate, adaptive solutions to his difficulties (Shepherd and Iles, 1976).

Implementation

With a knowledge of the technical methodology and goals of bibliotherapy, consideration can be given to the actual implementation of the procedure. First, as suggested by Roy (1979), a teacher should have some basic psychological knowledge in order to use bibliotherapy with students. This knowledge could include an understanding of the basic motivations underlying human behavior, methods by which children and young people face hindering situations, ways in which youngsters avoid reality to keep from coping with difficulties, means by which individuals deal with encountered problems, and how young people evolve desired personalities (Roy, 1979). This prerequisite knowledge, if not already in the teacher's background, may

be gained by enrolling in an appropriate psychology course or by selectively reading in some pertinent psychology texts.

Along with general psychological knowledge, a teacher needs to use methods of determining the specific problems faced by his or her students (Schuber, 1975). Several informal measures can be used to gain insight into students' problems, including interest inventories, observations of the interactions of the pupils, pupil-teacher conferences, and class discussions (Schubert, 1975). Schubert (1975) recommends valuable questions for use with these informal measures: for example, If you could have three wishes which would come true, what would you wish for?; Does anything frighten you? If so, what?; Do you worry about anything? If so, what? McWilliams and Rakes (1979) also suggest several projective inventories for interest and self-concept sampling.

A reading teacher should have guidelines to use in selecting the students who might benefit from bibliotherapy. Teachers are well advised to remember that although they do not have to be trained therapists to use the technique, they should, in general, confine their efforts to students who do not display serious maladjustment (Corman, 1975). Hoagland (1972) reveals that there is some disagreement concerning which pupils are most likely to benefit from the technique; some writers believe that both gifted and slow learners can be helped through bibliotherapy, while others assert that only the average or above average pupils who already enjoy reading can gain from the procedure. A practical guide suggested by Hoagland (1972) is for reading teachers to use the knowledge obtained concerning the emotional adjustment of her pupils and to

utilize the technique of bibliotherapy with students who are not seriously disturbed and who are in a state of emotional readiness for being helped with their problems.

Having selected pupils who could possibly benefit from bibliotherapy, the teacher must then locate appropriate reading selections for the student. McKinney (1977) effectively used short stories with college students to implement bibliotherapy; however, Russell and Shrodes (in Rubin, 1978, p. 221) and the majority of writers on the subject tend to stress the use of books to implement the technique. In general, the books should be selected because of their correlation with the needs of the child (Corman, 1975). However, Russell and Shrodes (in Rubin, 1978, p. 223) suggest that when working with some troubled children it might be wise to allow them to select from cheerful books with happy endings before moving them to books that deal with problems similar to their own. Helpful criteria to use in evaluating books appropriate to student needs include the following: concentration on a definite need, correlation with the child's independent reading level, focus on the problem of the child, realistic treatment of a subject, portrayal of believable characters. and sound representation of groups represented by the characters (Russell and Russell, 1979). Furthermore, the reading teacher should employ additional criteria with the books being chosen for remedial readers; they should have relatively direct story lines, be reasonably short, be printed with clear type and well-spaced lines, have ample meaning-giving illustrations, and be a comfortable size and shape for reading (Corman, 1975).

To find the books to evaluate and later recommend to children, a reading teacher must read many children's books, consult regularly with a knowledgeable children's librarian, and use reliable bibliographies of children's books. Corman (1975) suggests several useful bibliographies, including: Fare for the Reluctant Reader by Dunn and Jackman (1964), which is annotated, geared to grade levels seven through twelve, and arranged by subjects; Good Reading for Poor Readers (Spache, 1974), which is an annotated guide listing more than 500 books, indicates interest and reading levels, contains forty-six subject headings, and lists adaptations and simplified selections; Reading Ladders for Human Relations by Virginia Reid (1972), which divides the books into four areas of behavioral problems - "creating a positive self-image, living with others, appreciating different cultures, and coping with change;" Behavior Patterns in Children's Books by Clara Kircher (1966), which cites more than 500 books in twenty-four categories which are also indexed under 146 behavioral types. Baruth and Phillips (1976) also provide a shorter list of books suitable for use with middle school students. They are coded according to difficulty levels and are listed under seven different problem areas. Coody (1973) provides several chapters of useful ideas including emphasis on bibliotherapy, parent selection of books and books for art expression and cooking. Of particular interest to reading and lab teachers, Easy Reading offers a guide to books in series and periodicals for poor readers. The Horn Book and The Library Journal are also excellent periodical sources concerning the readability levels and the subject matter of new

books for children (Olsen, 1975). Finally, one of the finest resource volumes available is Dreyer's guide that includes references on 1,031 children's books on some 450 topics (1977). The book includes an author, subject and title index and is a must for a serious user of bibliotherapy.

A record keeping system for the books to be used in the bibliotherapy program is also needed and Olsen (1975) recommends a very useful one. He suggests keeping basic bibliographic information and a short content summary of each book on 3 X 5-inch cards in a file box. In addition, each card should contain, on the upper right-hand corner, the approximate readability and interest level of the book. The cards would be filed under appropriate problem-area categories in a definite order, for instance, alphabetically by author or title or by readability level.

Once a teacher is equipped with the prerequisite background information concerning the behavior patterns of children, the specific knowledge of individual student problems, the suitable candidates with whom to utilize the technique, and the appropriate books to use in implementing the bibliotherapy program, he or she is ready to concentrate on specific methods of implementation. In order for bibliotherapy to take place, a teacher must actually get the student to read suitable books (Russell and Russell, 1979). Suggestions for implementing bibliotherapy include: (1) discussing the content of several appropriate books in order to interest the child in them (Shepherd and Iles, 1976), (2) displaying appropriate books in a prominent section of the room (Shepherd and Iles, 1976), (3) using positive reinforcement to encourage the reading (Russell and Russell, 1979), and

(4) having students keep progress charts of the books they read (Russell and Russell, 1979). Also, in bringing a reader together with a book, it should be remembered that student response to bibliotherapy will be more positive if the teacher suggests several appropriate books and allows a student to make his or her own selections, rather than requiring a specific book to be read (Hoagland, 1972).

The activities used to implement bibliotherapy may be carried out in groups or with individual students (Olsen, 1975). Large group sessions are a useful way of initially launching the technique and should focus on a selection dealing with an area of concern relevant to an entire class (Olsen, 1975). Small group sessions are appropriate to use when a few children share the same problem (Olsen, 1975) and are willing to relate to each other about the books they are reading and their treatment of the shared difficulty. Finally, some students will have problems that will require individual sessions with the teacher. During individual conferences discussion of the books, personal feelings about the reading and related feelings may be covered.

How To's

Several activities that lend themselves to group or individual utilization of bibliotherapy are suggested by Russell and Russell (1979) and include: "role playing, dramatization and skits, puppetry, and use of pictures to guide discussion." Having children illustrate significant aspects of the stories could also serve as a helpful technique for initiating

discussions in groups or between an individual and the teacher (Olsen, 1975). Russell and Russell (1979) also relate an activity called "Roadblock" which is suitable for use with groups. In the activity, the teacher or a pupil reads a selection until the character is faced with a dilemma pertinent to the group's needs. The children are then called on to recommend suitable ways for the character to deal with the situation. As each solution is offered, the teacher holds up a "Roadblock" sign and presents a rational objection to the solution. Alternative solutions continue to be offered until at the close of the activity, all the solutions are analyzed in terms of their ability, realistically, to be carried out and of their potential threat to the individual. Students can also take turns blocking the solutions once they understand the game.

There are also activities which seem to lend themselves particularly to implementation of bibliotherapy on an individual basis. With individual college students, McKinney (1977) suggests the use of "Story Reaction Blanks" which require the students to rate the stories read in terms of interest and to record the personal reactions that they experienced during the reading on a form; the records are then used as initiating points for student-teacher discussions. Such records also seem appropriate for use with younger students because they do not require any sort of literary critical analysis of the books, but they do necessitate the recording of personal reactions to the material. By bringing the record to the teacher during conference time, relevant discussion could easily proceed from the

student's comments. Also, an individual student might benefit from composing questionaires to poll the opinions of classmates in regard to a problem he is dealing with and reading about (Russell and Russell, 1979). The results obtained from the questionaire procedure have been shown to help students realize that their feelings have been experienced by others and will probably not always be troublesome (Russell and Russell, 1979).

Effectiveness of Bibliotherapy

In their review of research, Heitzmann and Heitzmann (1975) report that the scarcity of research studies on bibliotherapy and the methodological difficulties involved in the studies that do exist make many additional studies necessary and the establishment of definite programs for training bibliotherapists are needed; until more research is conducted, teachers are advised to use caution when using the technique with students. Roy (1979) also asserts that bibliotherapy should be used as a supplement to other types of counseling and not as a substitute for them. As Olsen (1975), Corman (1975), and Roy (1979) attest, bibliotherapy is not a panacea without limitations. Roy (1979) recounts several serious limitations to the technique, including the following: insight gained during reading does not always lead to the actual solution of problems; the fears of some individuals are made stronger when they are read about; and some people tend to rationalize their problems instead of facing them clearly when they read about them. Olsen (1975) and Corman (1975) also state the warning in regard to bibliotherapy that a teacher must avoid letting a child withdraw into a fantasy world through

reading and thus escape completely from reality and from confronting his or her problems.

Despite its limitations, bibliotherapy can be an effective aid to other forms of therapy (Olsen, 1975), and it has proven to be effective in helping persons, not seriously maladjusted, adjust to their difficulties (McKinney, 1977) and (Russell and Russell, 1979). With the increased emphasis on values and values clarification in the classroom, another very important use for the techniques of bibliotherapy is made apparent (Heitzmann and Heitzmann, 1975). Also, bibliotherapy is a useful adjunct to the teaching of critical reading because it requires the student to use higher level comprehension skills, including: comparison, evaluation, and application. Thus, bibliotherapy would seem to be a viable technique for the reading teacher to become familiar with. However, it should be cautioned that in order to implement the technique proficiently, a teacher should have adequate technical knowledge of the process, be able to identify and evaluate the needs of students who could profit from its utilization, be able to select appropriate books for bibliotherapy, and have the ability to carry out appropriate activities and follow-up experiences.

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